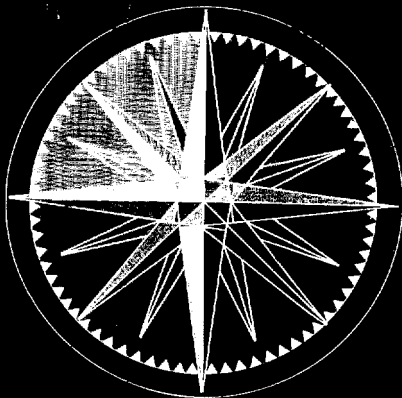


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# SPECIAL REPORT

RECENT ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMUNIST FRONT IN SOUTH VIETNAM

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

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## RECENT ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMUNIST FRONT IN SOUTH VIETNAM

During the past few months, the Vietnamese Communists have waged an increasingly vigorous campaign to gain free-world acceptance of their National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NFLSV) as the "legitimate representative" of the South Vietnamese people. This campaign has involved a broadening of Communist claims on the extent of front control in South Vietnam and a further open assumption of government trappings by the NFLSV.

So far, the Communists have stopped short of declaring the formation of a provisional front government at the national level in South Vietnam. A number of problems still stand in the way of such a move, and it does not appear likely in the near future. All indications are that Communist control of the NFLSV remains firm. During recent months, in fact, the front's Communist component has begun to operate more openly in directing and guiding NFLSV activities.

### Current Strategy

The Vietnamese Communists appear to believe that it is no longer possible to force a bilateral settlement of the war on a weakened Saigon government. They have probably concluded that, because of the direct and growing US participation in the conflict, an end to the fighting can be obtained now only in a multilateral, internationalized arrangement of the type which ended the Indochina war in 1954. In the course of such a settlement, the Communists realize that a strong image of NFLSV prestige and physical control in South Vietnam will be extremely important. It will not only help undermine the standing of the Saigon authorities, but will also assist the Communists in gaining an effective position

in any postwar political establishment in South Vietnam.

This past March, Hanoi and the NFLSV began to put greater emphasis on their long-standing demand that any settlement in South Vietnam be "in accordance" with the front program. In a major policy statement of 22 March, for example, the front asserted for the first time that it must have the "decisive voice in any negotiations to end the Vietnamese war."

In apparent support of such assertions, the NFLSV and the DRV suddenly increased their propaganda claims concerning the size of the "liberated areas" under front control in South Vietnam. Throughout 1964, the front's standard claim was that it controlled about two thirds of the

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territory and about half of the population in the South. Beginning in 1965, however, the claim was expanded to four fifths of the territory and almost 75 percent of the population.

Long-standing allegations by the front that it is the "genuine" or "legitimate" representative of the South Vietnamese people were also given greater emphasis this spring. In the 22 March statement, the front proclaimed itself the "only" legitimate representative. At about the same time, propaganda from Hanoi, Peiping, and Moscow began to give greater play to NFLSV claims of legitimacy identifying it in some cases as the only "legal" agent of the people in the South. This line, intended as a counterpoint to the slipping prestige of the Saigon regime, also appears, to have reflected a Vietnamese Communist estimate that Saigon and the United States could eventually be brought around to deal directly with the front as an independent political entity, thus strengthening the Communist position in any war settlement.

To accomplish this, the Communists are trying to create the impression that there can be no movement toward a negotiated settlement until the front has been "recognized" by the United States and Saigon.

[redacted] if there were to be any negotiations or settlement of the war it would have to be between the Liberation Front and the United States as

the "parties directly involved." The front, he said, could be approached in any of the countries in which it was represented.

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Several weeks later, [redacted]

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[redacted] were reportedly told that no "favorable" answer to US peace initiatives would be forthcoming until Washington agreed to accept the front as an equal "partner" in negotiations. Although the DRV government has never officially made clear its preconditions, if any, for starting negotiations on the war, DRV representatives are reported in recent months to have demanded that the US "recognize" the NFLSV before any talks start.

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#### Recognition Abroad

Hanoi has also been pushing during the past several months for greater bloc propaganda support of the NFLSV. It has reportedly appealed formally to all bloc countries to take measures to increase the front's prestige and to demand that it be admitted as a partner in any negotiations. Early in April, the NFLSV opened an office in Moscow--its seventh full-time post abroad. The Communists probably hope that Soviet propaganda support derived from this new publicity outlet will assist this enterprise and open new avenues for NFLSV contact with the non-Communist world.

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In Asia, the Vietnamese Communists have concentrated mainly on Cambodia, trying to elicit statements and actions by the Sihanouk regime supporting the front's claim to be the "legitimate" representative of South Vietnam. With Chinese encouragement and the active backing of the North Vietnamese, front representatives sat down with Cambodian officials in Peiping last December to discuss a formal treaty defining and guaranteeing the Cambodian-Vietnamese border. Although the negotiations failed to produce an agreement, Sihanouk's publicly demonstrated willingness to engage in treaty discussions with the NFLSV was a decided plus for the Communists. Sihanouk has also insisted that the NFLSV should represent South Vietnam in any international conference to guarantee Cambodian neutrality.

The front has also found some support this year in Indonesia. In late April, at Sukarno's invitation, front delegates attended the tenth anniversary celebrations of the Afro-Asian conference in Bandung as the only representatives of South Vietnam. They were feted by the host Indonesian Government and readily mixed with many of the visiting Afro-Asian state officials.

By far the strongest NFLSV international initiative this year, however, was undertaken in connection with the now-postponed Bandung II meeting which was to be held in Algiers in June.

Throughout the late spring, NFLSV and other Asian Communist representatives maneuvered behind the scenes to line up support for excluding Saigon from the gathering and to have the front accepted as the representative of South Vietnam. Both Chinese and North Vietnamese Foreign Ministry officials made preconference trips to friendly African countries to enlist support. An NFLSV delegation later toured the same circuit.

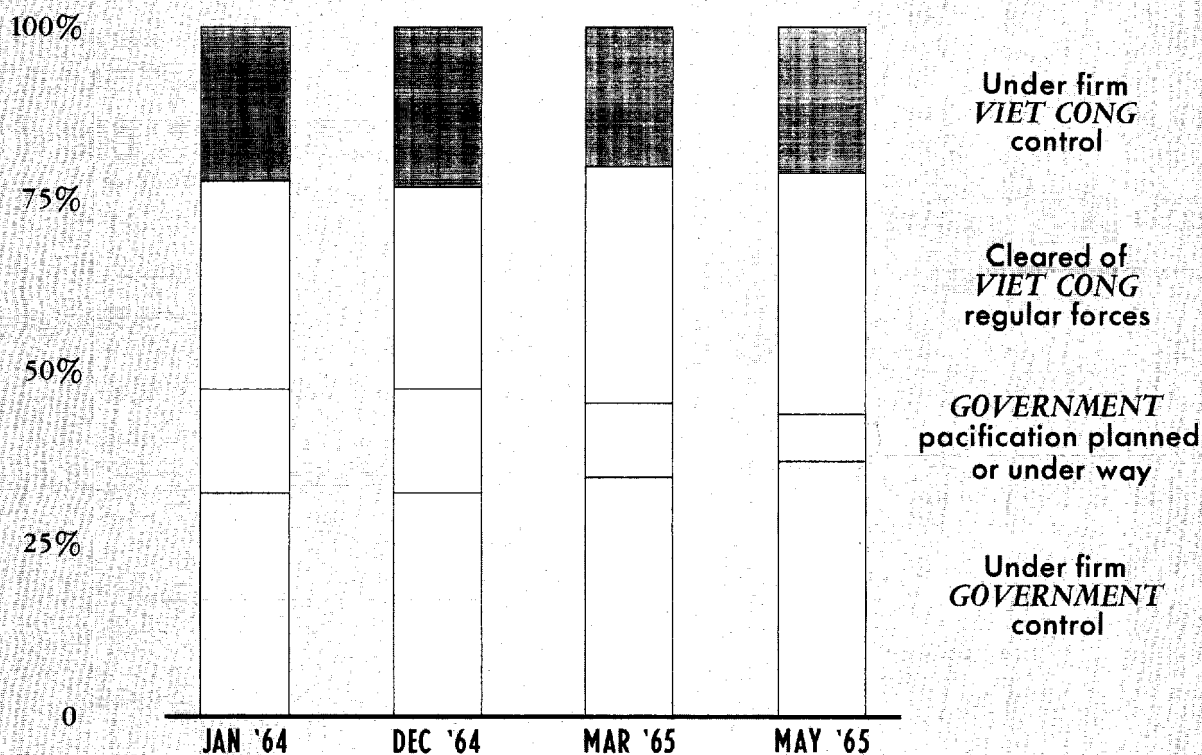
Just before the Algiers meeting was scheduled to start, the front released a memorandum supporting its claim to represent South Vietnam. While castigating the Saigon government, the memorandum cataloged all the "evidence" that the NFLSV operates as a de facto government at local levels in South Vietnam and that it also has widespread popular support. The memorandum claimed that the front "wields genuine, steady, and widespread power, whose basis is the self-managing committees elected by the population in liberated areas." The memorandum in effect summed up the propaganda line of the NFLSV during the past six months, which has stopped just short of announcing the formation of a provisional front government at the national level in South Vietnam. The chief NFLSV representative to the Algiers conference told the Cairo press that the front "is a government, but it is not yet official."

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## CONTROL OF THE RURAL POPULATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM

(Population Base Approximately 13,000,000)\*



\*The estimated urban population of 3 million is concentrated in a few large cities (such as SAIGON, HUE, and DA NANG) and is considered under firm government control.

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Extent of NFLSV Influence  
in South Vietnam

Despite its expansive claims, there is little evidence that the front has recently picked up an independent following of any size within South Vietnam. In the territory firmly controlled by the Viet Cong, the front is visibly projected by the Communists as a government, and exercises a wide variety of functions. It collects taxes, conscripts manpower for military and economic services, organizes the local economy, runs rudimentary schools, hospitals, and courts, and has established local administrative committees based on "popular" elections. There is no evidence, however, that even within these areas where some 20-25 percent of the rural population resides, the front has a voluntary following of any consequence. Its authority here seems to be based mainly on coercion.

The front also conducts political agitation in many of the areas cleared of Communist regular force units. Irregular Communist bands and sympathizers operate almost at will in these regions, where there is often little in the way of effective governmental machinery answerable to Saigon. About 25 percent of the rural population resides in such regions. In the areas where the government has begun planning or has begun to implement pacification pro-

grams, there is less front agitation. Approximately 10-15 percent of the rural population lives in these regions. NFLSV influence is nearly negligible in the remaining areas, comprising some 35 percent of the rural population, where government military and civil control is firm.

This is also true among the nearly three million urban residents in the major cities and towns in South Vietnam.

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[redacted] Communist organizers had been unable to establish either a front committee or set up any of the front's mass organizations. In practice, the hard-core Communist underground located in the area acted in the front's name.

There is still no evidence that the NFLSV has been successful in attracting significant support from any of the politically influential groups in South Vietnam. [redacted] overt propaganda [redacted]

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[redacted] however, is being directed at the Buddhists, students, labor union members, and armed forces personnel. Captured documents indicate that the Communist authorities consider their inability to generate popular support--particularly in the urban areas--one of their major weaknesses.

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Forming a Provisional  
Government

The NFLSV's failure so far to declare the formation of a national provisional government is probably in part a consequence of its failure to attract support from the grass roots and from individuals of stature in South Vietnam. Formation of a national government of obscure personalities at this time would reveal the front's lack of volunteer backing. It could also provoke considerable active opposition from other politically ambitious groups in South Vietnam, such as the Buddhists, who themselves aspire to a position of influence in any postwar government.

The Communists may also be holding off on announcing a provisional government until they have acquired a fairly extensive, unified geographic base under firm control. The major Communist "war zones" now held by Viet Cong troops are scattered and vulnerable to government raids and interdiction. It would be difficult at present for the Communists to set up a "capital," receive foreign visitors, or conduct business securely in South Vietnam. The current Communist monsoon military campaign may be designed to cope with this problem. In part, Communist military strategy seems aimed at eliminating government influence from a large area of the central highlands of South Vietnam contiguous with the Cambodian border.

On the other hand, it is conceivable that the Vietnamese Communists do not regard the possession of a large secure base as a prerequisite. They could conduct activities from outside South Vietnam, possibly under bloc protection. They could thus be awaiting only the proper psychological moment to announce a provisional government. Acceptance of the front as the representative of South Vietnam, for example, at an influential conference like the now-postponed Bandung II meeting could start a bandwagon trend for the NFLSV.

On balance, however, it appears that the Communists do not intend to proclaim the formation of a provisional NFLSV government in the near future. They are clearly concerned with the political repercussions of such a move while the Viet Cong power position in South Vietnam is still fluid. DRV and NFLSV efforts to develop international pressure on the US and the Republic of Vietnam to agree to front participation in settling the war would almost certainly be complicated by the official establishment at this time of a formal front government. Some Afro-Asian states which have urged direct negotiations with the NFLSV might be less forthcoming. Moreover, the interjection of a formal front government into the picture would also make it more difficult for the US and the Saigon regime to concede any role to the front in settling the war.

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Additional NFLSV Goals

US and South Vietnamese agreement to deal directly with the front and to treat it as a "partner" in settling the war would by no means guarantee that the Communists would move quickly toward a political settlement of the conflict. If the US and Saigon recognized the independent status of the front while the Communists still retained the military initiative in South Vietnam, Hanoi and the Viet Cong leaders would certainly take it as a sign of weakness and probably would hold out for additional concessions--perhaps prior US military withdrawal--before acquiescing to any meaningful discussions on the conflict.

Beyond broad statements of front policy such as the intent to form a "national, coalition government" and to move toward "reunification" with North Vietnam, the Vietnamese Communists have been very vague on specific NFLSV goals when the fighting ends. An intent to leave considerable maneuvering room seems to lie behind the basic Vietnamese Communist line that any settlement of the war must be in "accordance" with the NFLSV program.

It is probable, however, that at a minimum the Communists would seek to gain the key defense, foreign policy, and economic offices in any coalition government so that they could make quick moves toward implementing such policies as land redistribution and socialization of industry. Possession of the

key offices would also enable the Communists, operating through the front, to stifle quickly any opposition to a full and open Communist take-over. Possession of these offices was a prime Communist goal during the political settlement in Laos in 1962, under which a coalition government was set up.

Communist Control of the Front

There have been no indications in recent months that Vietnamese Communist control of the front is any less effective than in the past. The identity of the Communists in South Vietnam chiefly responsible for running the front is still not fully established, but they have in recent months become somewhat more open in their activities. This is apparent in the increasing publicity given the so-called People's Revolutionary Party (PRP), the acknowledged Communist component of the NFLSV. For several years following the PRP's organization in 1961, publicity accorded it by the Viet Cong and the DRV was very scant. It was presented as only one constituent element of the NFLSV with a voice equal, but not superior, to non-Communist elements in the front.

Recently, however, front propaganda has begun publicly to depict the PRP as exercising a central and controlling role in the liberation struggle and in the front itself. Publicity has been given to PRP personalities addressing Communist military conferences. The contents of PRP journals have been

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disseminated over the front's radio. PRP statements which clearly reveal Communist-type domestic objectives and programs for the revolution in South Vietnam are beginning to be publicized on a limited scale.

The front radio, for example, on 25 April, broadcast PRP plans for a future government in South Vietnam in which the party admitted that it was not feasible to rely on coups d'etat to create a "genuinely revolutionary government" or a "worker peasant alliance led by the working class." The Communist Party would lead the future government, which would be a "people's" democracy with the participation of four Communist-styled "revolutionary classes" (workers, peasants, and petty and national bourgeoisie). The front also reorganized its movement for workers in April, renaming it the "Liberation Trade Union," in typical Communist terminology and placing it under the direct leadership of the PRP. The announced purpose of the reorganization was to "reshape the working class into a more revolutionary vanguard."

#### Hanoi and the Front

The North Vietnamese appear to retain firm control over the Communists in the South who guide the day-to-day activities of the

front. It is clear from captured documents that the NFLSV was originally set up in 1961 on Hanoi's orders and direction. Since that time, the evidence has continued to point to close ties between the DRV and the NFLSV. North Vietnamese and NFLSV delegations, for example, still often travel together abroad, and the front leaders use DRV passports. Hanoi also still monitors front propaganda broadcasts, apparently for control and review purposes.

The occasionally differing treatment by DRV and the front propaganda of developments in Vietnam does not appear to indicate policy fissures between the North Vietnamese and front leaders. These differences arise mainly from the varying tactical considerations bearing on the two parties and do not relate to their accord on over-all Communist objectives in South Vietnam. If the North Vietnamese had any doubt as to their ability to control and guide the NFLSV, both before and after a settlement of the war in South Vietnam, they would hardly be likely to push as they have during the past few months for an independent NFLSV role in settling the conflict, and for direct US and South Vietnamese dealings with the Liberation Front.

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